



# **UNIVERSIDAD DEL SALVADOR**

**Facultad de Filosofía y Letras**

**Doctorado en Lenguas Modernas**

**Gaps, Silences and Absences in Orson Welles:  
A Poststructuralist Approach to the Analysis of  
The Stranger and Touch of Evil**

UNIVERSIDAD  
DEL SALVADOR

**DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**

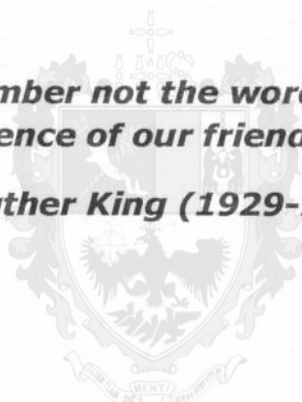
**Lic. María Rosa Mucci**

CANDIDATE TO THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR EN LENGUAS MODERNAS

**OCTOBER 2010**

***"In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but  
the silence of our friends."***

***Martin Luther King (1929-1968)***



USAL  
UNIVERSIDAD  
DEL SALVADOR

## Dedication

*I would like to dedicate this work to*

*The memory of my mother who taught me so many wonderful things about life.*

*To my husband who lovingly chooses me every day.*

*To my two sons who give sense to my life.*

*To my father and my sister for their unfailing support.*



USAL  
UNIVERSIDAD  
DEL SALVADOR

## Acknowledgements

Firstly I would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Dr. Omar Villarreal whom I had the pleasure of having as my dissertation director. Without his expert guidance and his profound observations, I could have never accomplished this study. To Omar, my most sincere respect and gratitude.

I must also thank Lic. Beatriz Castiñeira for the long hour discussions which have been so enriching. In the same way, my kindest gratitude to the colleagues who unconditionally supported me in this project in various ways.

Also, my most sincere thanks to Nicolás Zadubiec for sharing with me his knowledge of films and his enthusiasm for learning, to Mariano Zadubiec who always contributed with his expertise on technological matters and to Eduardo Zadubiec who showed permanent understanding and collaboration throughout the process of writing.

Finally, to my family and friends whose support in the different stages of the writing of this dissertation will be always treasured.

María Rosa Mucci  
October 2010

## Abstract

The analysis of films has mainly focused on the role of theory to explain how scientific methods help to understand film theory. More often than not, attention has been primarily placed on language; although in films there is a whole world of signification in what is not explicitly said and interpretation is very often left in the hands of the viewer.

Among the wide variety of approaches to the analysis of texts that the 20th century produced, *Poststructuralism* has contributed greatly to the understanding of meaning by analyzing the gaps of indeterminacy or “holes” within a text. The theory of deconstruction has provided the means to decentre the text and to focus on the absences which always entail symbolic representations

In addition to Poststructuralism, *Psychoanalysis* has also contributed through the works of Freud and Lacan; particularly, through the concept of the unconscious as a storehouse for what is repressed.

This study analyses the work of director and actor Orson Welles in two films: *The Stranger* and *Touch of Evil*. In both films, Welles chooses what information to hide and obviously, it is the task of the viewer to fill in the gaps to achieve meaning.

The analysis of data has shown that the selection of gaps is not arbitrary, this means that the intention of Welles is to focus on certain symbols in detriment of others. The study also concluded that, as a director, Orson Welles, follows a pattern that assigns meaning to the actions performed by evil characters, including here the ones expressed and repressed and that these actions contribute to the construction of tone.

Additionally, this dissertation examines theoretical frameworks and critical approaches that have shaped the ways in which films have been interpreted by scholars mainly *Poststructuralism* and *Psychoanalysis* in order to assess the pertinence of such theoretical paradigms for that intended purpose.

Key Words: Poststructuralism – Psychoanalysis – Gaps of Indeterminacy – Film theory – Deconstruction

---

El análisis de películas se ha focalizado principalmente en el rol que cumple la teoría al tratar de explicar de qué forma los métodos científicos facilitan la comprensión de la teoría del cine. En general, la atención se ha colocado esencialmente sobre la lengua; aunque en el cine, hay un universo de significados en aquello que no se dice explícitamente y la interpretación frecuentemente se deja en manos del espectador.

Entre la amplia variedad de enfoques para el análisis de textos que surgieron en el siglo 20, el Post-estructuralismo ha contribuido enormemente a la comprensión del significado al analizar los espacios de indeterminación o "agujeros" dentro de un texto. La teoría de la deconstrucción ha posibilitado los medios para la descentralización del texto y el posterior análisis de las ausencias que siempre contienen representaciones simbólicas.

Además del Pos-estructuralismo, el Psicoanálisis también ha contribuido a partir de los trabajos de Freud y Lacan; particularmente, a través del concepto del inconsciente como el lugar donde se almacena lo que se reprime.

Este estudio analiza el trabajo del director y el actor Orson Welles en dos de sus películas: *El Extraño* y *Sed de Mal*. En ambas, Welles elige qué información esconder y obviamente, es la tarea del espectador completar los espacios para lograr entender.

El análisis de la información muestra que la selección de espacios no es arbitraria, esto significa que Welles se interesa por ciertos símbolos en detrimento de otros. Este estudio concluye que, como director, Orson Welles sigue una estructura que asigna significado a las acciones que realizan los protagonistas (que representan el mal), sean éstas expresadas o reprimidas y que estas acciones contribuyen a crear el tono de la historia.

Además, este trabajo examina los marcos teóricos y los enfoques críticos que han determinado de qué forma las películas han sido interpretadas por los teóricos especialmente aquellos que siguen la línea del Post-estructuralismo y el Psicoanálisis con el fin de evaluar la pertinencia de estos paradigmas.

Palabras Clave: Post- estructuralismo – Psicoanálisis – Espacios de indeterminación – Teoría del Cine – Deconstrucción.



USAL  
UNIVERSIDAD  
DEL SALVADOR

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
The Poststructuralist Revolution: Context.....	1
Purpose of the Research.....	4
Methodological Framework .....	4
Organization of this work .....	6
<b>CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1. From Structuralism to Poststructuralism .....	8
1.2. Literary Deconstruction.....	13
1.3. Implications.....	16
1.3.1. The question of language .....	16
1.3.2. The question of ideology.....	17
1.4. Decentring and Recentring. Gaps and Silences .....	18
1.5. Psychoanalytic Theory.....	19
1.6. Poststructuralist Psychoanalysis.....	23
1.7. Poststructuralism and Deconstruction in Films .....	24
1.8. Film Semiotics .....	28
1.9. Film Noir .....	33
<b>CHAPTER 2: ORSON WELLES .....</b>	<b>39</b>
2.1. The Life of the Actor and the Director.....	39
2.2. His fight with Hollywood.....	45
2.3. The Auteur who is not an Auteur.....	48
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE STRANGER.....</b>	<b>53</b>
3.1. Analysis of the plot and setting .....	53
3.2. Characters.....	59
3.2.1. Franz Kindler or Charles Rankin?.....	61
3.2.2. The complexity of the character.....	63
3.3. Absences.....	64
3.3.1. What is repressed.....	64
3.3.2. What is expressed .....	67
3.3.3. The meaning of symbols .....	69
<b>CHAPTER 4: TOUCH OF EVIL .....</b>	<b>78</b>
4.1. Analysis of the plot and setting .....	78
4.2. The final cut.....	83



4.3. Characters .....	90
4.3.1. Quinlan vs. Vargas .....	94
4.3.2. The static property in characters .....	97
4.4. Silences .....	99
4.4.1. Displacements and condensations .....	102
4.4.2. The Unconscious .....	104
<b>CHAPTER 5: THE PURLOINED LETTER</b> .....	<b>110</b>
5.1. The Hidden Action .....	110
5.2. Greimas's contribution to the theory of signification .....	111
5.3. The power of the image and the history of Psychoanalysis Film Criticism .....	115
5.3.1. The beginnings of Psychoanalytic Film Theory .....	116
5.3.2. Cinema as apparatus .....	119
5.3.2.1. The theory .....	121
5.4. The position of the director: tone .....	124
<b>CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS</b> .....	<b>128</b>
Conclusions .....	128
Implications of this research .....	129
<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	<b>132</b>
Appendix 1: The films of Orson Welles .....	132
Appendix 2: Changes made to the original version of Touch of Evil .....	136
Appendix 3: Orson Welles's letter to the New Statesman- London regarding Touch of Evil .....	142
<b>WORKS CITED</b> .....	<b>144</b>

## INTRODUCTION

### The Poststructuralist Revolution: Context

According to Ferdinand de Saussure, meaning in language is just a matter of difference. We may say that meaning is the result of a process of division of signs; consequently, language is no more than an endless chain of signifiers in search of their signifieds.

Structuralism begins with the work of Ferdinand de Saussure but historically and logically derives from Formalism. Roman Jakobson, an original Formalist, was by virtue of emigration, one of the first influences on French Structuralism, which flourished from the 1950s through the 1960s. From Jakobson, early structuralists learned of de Saussure's ideas about language.

Structuralism which had dominated French intellectual life was displaced by a new flourishing movement: Poststructuralism. This approach was evident in the works of theorists as Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard.

Poststructuralism continues Structuralism in the belief that language is the key to our understanding of ourselves and the world but they departed from the main assumptions of Structuralism because they considered that language was not a complete, knowable, fixed ground system as its predecessors believed but a system that is open and permits a multiplicity of interpretations.

Thus, the view of language changes completely. Structuralism asserts that there is no link between a word and that which it refers to; that this relationship is an arbitrary condition, however, it does not really take into account the consequences of this gap between language and the world and that language can be extremely slippery since it is full of paradoxes.

In 1967 Derrida introduces the term *Deconstruction* in "Of Grammatology". He "wished to translate and adapt to [his] own ends the Heideggerian word *Destruktion*"<sup>1</sup>. He considers that Western tradition has placed emphasis more on the spoken than on the written word and this is a problem since, according to Derrida, language is inherently unreliable and it operates on the basis of differentiation and this fact makes it possible that words refer to other words through difference. If the meaning we see in words is the result of difference, what we assume is that meaning is always contaminated.

The signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts.

(Derrida [1982]1996: 30)

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger (September 26, 1889 – May 26, 1976) was an influential German philosopher known for his existential and phenomenological explorations of the "question of Being." His best-known book, *Being and Time*, is considered to be one of the most important philosophical works of the 20th century. Heidegger has been influential beyond philosophy, in literature, psychology, and artificial intelligence.

Words never achieve stability because their meaning is always modified by what follows. Meaning is the product of difference. As Derrida explains:

The movement of signification is possible only if each so called “present” element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not. (Derrida [1982] 1996: 32)

Derrida is best known for his theory of Deconstruction which takes its name from his strategy of analyzing texts to reveal the inconsistencies and contradictions. In literary terms, a text never achieves closure, there is no final meaning. In Jeremy Hawthorn’s words “Thus for Derrida meaning of a text is always unfolding just ahead of the interpreter, unrolling in front of him or her like a never-ending carpet whose final edge never reveals itself” (Hawthorn 1998: 39)

One characteristic of Deconstruction is to invert differences or change the order in binary oppositions and to point to what is marginalized and, in this way, to have the possibility of setting up alternative centres. Deconstructors focus on absences, gaps and silences to understand the ways in which ideology operates.

## **Purpose of the research**

Considering that films are texts that make meaning, the intention of the present study is to analyze *The Stranger* and *Touch of Evil*; both films directed by Orson Welles and explain whether:

- a- The gaps of indeterminacy in the films are closely connected to what is being repressed in the unconscious of the two protagonists: Charles/Franz in *The Stranger* and Quinlan in *Touch of Evil*
- b- These evil characters are portrayed in such a way that their unsaid actions lead the viewers to think that the director justifies them and, in this way, contributes to the creation of tone.
- c- The gaps chosen by Orson Welles are symbolic since they lead us to discover that there is a systematic omission of actions and this pattern is repeated in both films.

## **Methodological Framework**

The content analysis research method will be used to analyze the gaps of indeterminacy as well as the meaning hidden in symbols representing these

gaps. The protagonists of both films will be compared paying particular attention to the actions that have been repressed.

These ideas will be explored from the perspective of the poststructuralist approach in general, and the theory of deconstruction in particular. Poststructuralism will contribute to the understanding of meaning by analyzing the gaps of indeterminacy or "holes" within the text. The theory of deconstruction will provide the means to decentre the text and to focus on the absences which always entail symbolic representations

In addition, some concepts taken from the psychoanalytical approach (Freudian and Lacanian lines) will be used to clarify what aspects of language should be analyzed to interpret the absences in the text. From Freud, we will explore the concepts of *displacement* and *condensation* and from Lacan the idea that the unconscious is structured like a language, which means that meaning, is always hidden

The analysis of data intends to show that the selection of the gaps is not arbitrary, and that the intention of the director is to focus on certain symbols in detriment of others. The study also intends to evidence that, as a director, Orson Welles, follows a pattern that assigns meaning to the actions performed by evil characters, including here the ones expressed and repressed and that these actions represent symbols that are systematic in both films.

## Organization of this work

This work consists of an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 presents a review of the literature, placing emphasis on the outline of the development of poststructuralism as a theoretical approach and the role of the theory of deconstruction within this context. At the same time, the most important tenets of the theory of Psychoanalysis will be explained and the role of Poststructuralist Psychoanalysis will be revisited. Finally the impact of these approaches on films will be explored.

Chapter 2 will focus on the life and work of Orson Welles as a director and as an actor. At this point, the paper will concentrate on his style and position within the Hollywood film industry in the 1940s and 1950s. As a consequence, we will unveil the main reasons why Orson Welles is not considered an "auteur".

From this, we pass on to the analysis of *The Stranger* and *Touch of Evil* in chapters 3 and 4 respectively. We will consider the role of the protagonists as centres of the structure trying to show the main traits and the elements repressed in their unconscious. These elements will allow to explain the tone in both films.

Chapter 5 will analyze the history of Psychoanalysis Film Criticism and the conception of the cinema as apparatus. Besides, this chapter will focus on the role of the director in the creation of tone.

The conclusions and possible implications of this study have been included in the last section of this work.

An appendix and a list of works cited have also been included at the end of this study.

